Calendar No. 984

82D CONGRESS, 1st Session | SENATE | REPORT No. 1035

AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

OCTOBER 18 (legislative day, OCTOBER 1), 1951.—Ordered to be printed

UNIV. OF MICH.
OCT 29 1951
LAW LIBRARY

Mr. ELLENDER, from the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 4027]

The Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 4027) to provide for an agricultural program in the Virgin Islands, having considered the same, report thereon with a recommendation that it do pass without amendment.

H. R. 4027 is identical to S. 2809 of the Eighty-first Congress, which was passed by the Senate July 26, 1950. The need for an agricultural research and extension service program in the Virgin Islands is explained in House Report 846, submitted by the House Committee on Agriculture on the pending bill. A copy of the report is attached hereto as a part of this report.

[H. Rept. No. 846, 82d Cong., 1st sess.]

The purpose of this bill is to authorize the transfer from the Secretary of the Interior to the Secretary of Agriculture of certain lands and facilities now or formerly employed in general agricultural educational work in the Virgin Islands and to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct in the Virgin Islands an agricultural research and extension service program.

HISTORICAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

United States purchased the Virgin Islands from the Government of Denmark in 1917, for reasons of national defense. The islands were discovered by Columbus on his second voyage in 1493, and after a period of colonization by various nations, including the French, English, Dutch, Spanish, and Danish, the islands were acquired by Denmark and remained under the sovereignty of that country for approximately 250 years.

Area and topography.—The Virgin Islands, consisting of the 3 main islands and about 50 uninhabited islands and cays, lie 40 miles east of Puerto Rico. The total area of these islands is about 152 square miles: St. Croix is 84 square miles in area; St. Thomas, 28 square miles; and St. John, 20 square miles. Mountain ridges from 500 to 1,500 feet high run the east and west length of each island. On St. Thomas and St. John the ridges slope steeply on both sides to the sea, leaving only small pockets of relatively level land between projecting spurs. On St. Croix the land slopes gradually to the southern shore, about 4 miles away, and makes possible its cultivation by use of machinery.

Climate.—The Virgin Islands have a semiarid tropical climate. Temperatures range from a winter's evening low of 69° to a summer's day high of 91°, with a daily range of temperature rarely as much as 10°. An almost constant sea breeze from the east tempers the sun's heat and keeps down the humidity. The average yearly rainfall is 47 inches, occurring usually in the form of showers. Much of this water is lost through rapid runoff into the sea and through evaporation. Precipitation varies somewhat from month to month. About 45 percent of the rainfall occurs in the last 4 months of the year. Rainfall varies considerably within each island; on St. Croix the rainfall averages about 15 inches more annually on the western end of the island than on the eastern end. The average rainfall from year to year varies from a minimum of 20 inches to a maximum of 75 inches. The islands are in the hurricane path; however, only three in the past 40 years have hit the islands. Seldom are any lives lost.

Soils.—Much of the soils of the three islands are of volcanic origin. On the plains of St. Croix, marl soils derived from younger series of marls and limestones occur. The soils are, in general, fairly fertile and the arable areas are well adapted to a large variety of fruits, vegetables, cotton, and sugarcane. Yields are good in years when the precipitation is sufficient. The steeper and stonier areas are well adapted to tropical forest trees and to pasture grasses.

The population of the islands is culturally and racially affiliated with the British West Indies. The prevailing language is English, and approximately 90 percent of the people 10 years of age can read and write. Because of the declining economy of the Virgin Islands, which has been almost constant for the past century there has been a steady drain of young people away from the islands to Puerto Rico and to the mainland of the Unitd States. The high point of population on the islands was reached in 1835 when there were a total of 43,178 inhabitants. At that time virtually all the arable land in the islands was planted to sugarcane, and the sugar industry was a profitable occupation for the people. Since that time, the Virgin Islands have found themselves less and less able to compete with other areas in which heavier rainfall makes sugar production an easier and more profitable operation. The acreage of sugarcane on the islands has declined so that at the present time there are only about 5,000 acres devoted to this crop and the profit from sugar has diminished to the point where this operation carried out by the Virgin Islands Corporation has shown a net loss over the past several years.

Concurrently with the decline in sugar as a profitable local industry, the population of the islands has decreased until the census of 1950 shows a population of 26,654. Other crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and cattle have supplanted sugarcane in some of the rural areas of the Virgin Islands, but today only a total of approximately 6,500 acres is devoted to all forms of cultivated crops.

The industries of the Virgin Islands are very limited and consist chiefly of fuel bunkering and the servicing of ships, the manufacture of rum and bay rum, production of sugar, production of charcoal, deep-sea commercial fishing, handicrafts, and the tourist trade. The decline in the demand for rum since the end of World War II has reduced that industry to an unprofitable position and has been a serious blow to the economy of the islands.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE ISLANDS

The Organic Act of June 22, 1936, is the "constitution" of the Virgin Islands. It provides for coordinate and separate powers of the executive, legislative, and the judicial branches of the government, and organizes the Virgin Islands into an insular possession of two districts: the municipality of St. Croix, and the municipality of St. Thomas and St. John.

Congress has the authority and responsibility of legislating for the Virgin Islands. Federal legislation enacted for the States and Territories of the United States automatically applies to Alaska and Hawaii, but not to the Virgin Islands unless they are specifically included. Local legislative powers are delegated to the two municipalities and are vested in their respective municipal councils, which are locally elected. Joint sessions of the two municipal councils are designated as the Legislative Assembly of the Virgin Islands and convene at least once each calendar year upon call of the Governor. Bills passed by the legislative assembly are subject to the approval of the Governor.

The Governor is appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. He executes the laws of the United States applicable to the Virgin Islands, and the laws and ordinances of the islands. He may veto legislation adopted by the legislative authorities of the islands.

Supervision and coordination of the various Federal activities in the Virgin Islands is carried out by the Division of Territories and Island Possessions of the

Department of the Interior through the Governor of the Virgin Islands. This Division, under the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior, is the principal agency responsible for the development and execution of the Territorial policy of the United States in the islands.

The judicial powers of the Virgin Islands are vested in the United States District Court of the Virgin Islands and in the police courts of each municipality. Appeals are made to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third District in Boston, and thence to the United States Supreme Court.

The chief commercial operations on the islands are carried out by the Virgin Islands Company. This is a corporation chartered by the municipality of St. Thomas and St. John, with the Secretary of the Interior, the Under Secretary of the Interior, and the Governor of the Virgin Islands as the stockholders. It operates federally owned properties whose depreciated value on June 30, 1947, was $1,540,000.

The Company holds a dominant position in the agricultural programs of the islands. It owns and operates the only sugarcane mill, where is processed the cane from Company lands and from some 550 small farms. It owns a rum distillery; owns and operates 5,000 acres of the best agricultural land, where 60 percent of the sugarcane is produced and 1,000 to 1,500 farm laborers are employed; operates the rural electrification plant for St. Croix; provides machinery service to farmers; and owns a modern abattoir on St. Croix.

AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS

An agricultural experiment station was established in St. Croix by the Danes in 1910. This came under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture in January 1919 and remained under that jurisdiction until July 1932, when jurisdiction of the whole island group was transferred from the Navy Department to the Department of the Interior. At that time the agricultural experiment station was also transferred to the Department of the Interior.

From 1919 to 1932 while the station was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture, a rather extensive program of scientific experimentation was carried on and considerable valuable information was developed. Under the Department of the Interior, because of reductions in appropriations and other factors, the research work has been discontinued almost entirely and the agricultural-station operations have been confined to some educational activities and the providing of farmers with vegetable slips, seeds, sire service, veterinary service, machinery for hire, and plant and animal quarantine inspection for imports to the islands. In 1949 the staff was composed of a director, three extension agents, a veterinarian, and two clerks.

Other agricultural programs administered by the Department of Agriculture have been inaugurated and carried on in the Virgin Islands to some extent. Amendments to the Farmers Home Administration Act have made the lending activities of that agency available in the Virgin Islands. The agricultural land of the Virgin Islands is covered in two soil-conservation districts and two technical men of the Soil Conservation Service have been assigned to each district.

Loans by the Rural Electrification Administration have made electricity available to several hundred farms in the rural areas of St. Croix. Three programs administered by the Production and Marketing Administration operate in the Virgin Islands: the school-lunch program, the agricultural conservation program, and the Sugar Act program.

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS LEGISLATION

In the summer of 1948 the Secretary of the Interior requested the Secretary of Agriculture to review the agricultural situation and potential in the Virgin Islands and to determine ways in which the Federal agricultural programs might best assist in meeting the problems of the islands. Accordingly an interbureau committee was established within the Department of Agriculture to make the requested study and recommendations.

This committee submitted the results of its study in a report dated June 22 1949, and a bill (H. R. 8357) embodying the committee's recommendations as to the establishment of an agricultural research and extension program in the islands was introduced in the House. At about the same time an identical bill (S. 2809) was introduced in the Senate. The Senate bill passed that body without amendment. Hearings were held by this committee on the House bill (H. R. 8357), but the committee deferred action on the bill for several reasons,

one of which was the hope that the committee or a subcommittee might make an on-the-spot inspection of the agriculture of the islands before passing upon legislation, and, another, the feeling of the committee that the program proposed by the Department of Agriculture for the islands was somewhat more extensive than might be necessary.

Due to reasons beyond the control of the committee, a subcommittee was not able to visit the islands until too late in the Eighty-first Congress to permit action on the bill during that Congress. Accordingly, the bill was reintroduced in the Eighty-second Congress as H. R. 4027, the bill reported herewith. In the meantime the Department of Agriculture had revised somewhat its proposed research and extension program for the Virgin Islands, in accordance with the suggestions made by the committee at its hearing during the Eighty-first Congress. That revised program was presented orally to the committee during its hearings on this bill (H. R. 4027) and met with committee approval.

Those proposals have since been reduced to writing and are embodied in the letter from the Secretary of Agriculture recommending approval of this bill which is appended hereto and made a part of this report.

NEED FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND EXTENSION WORK IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

There is no doubt of the great need of agricultural research, experimental, and extension work in the Virgin Islands. The population, soil, topography, climate, and market outlets of the Virgin Islands are so different from those on the mainland of the United States that the research and experimental work carried out by the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges in and through the various States are of little value to the agriculture of the Virgin Islands.

The soil of the islands is fertile and rainfall and other climatic conditions are favorable to the efficient production of many crops. In most cases, however, the environment requires plant and animal varieties and techniques of farm operation which are peculiar to the islands. The research and experimentation necessary to determine which crop varieties, what types of animals, and what farming techniques are best adapted to the islands, can be carried out only in the Virgin Islands. It is unfair to the people of the Virgin Islands, citizens of the United States, that they should be deprived of the type of agricultural research and educational work which has been of such great benefit to the farmers of the United States for the past decades. It is poor economy from the national standpoint to have the soils of the Virgin Islands producing the wrong kind of crops, crops that are inefficient and unprofitable, or no crops at all.

The problem of carrying on both agricultural research and extension work in the Virgin Islands is different from that encountered in any of the States. This work is carried on in the States entirely through and in cooperation with the State land-grant colleges. There is no land-grant college in the Virgin Islands. In the islands, therefore, this work must be carried on entirely under Federal supervision and administration.

In its original recommendations to the committee on this subject, the Department of Agriculture proposed to carry on its research experimental, soil conservation, and educational programs in the Virgin Islands along the same pattern under which those programs are administered in the States, viz, the maintenance of a separate administrative organization for each of the separate activities. It was this aspect of the proposal which the committee felt in its original hearings on the bill might well be modified. In accordance with the suggestions of the committee, the Department has modified its recommendations in this regard and the modified proposal is embodied in the letter from the Secretary of Agriculture on the proposed legislation.

Under the revised program of the Department of Agriculture, the various aspects of the program will be coordinated under one director. He will have several assistants qualified in the various phases of the program, such as research, soil conservation, education, etc., but these will work as a team under the director instead of being set off individually in their different administrative fields as they are normally in carrying out these programs in the States.

The committee believes that this will result in a coordinated and integrated agricultural program adapted to the needs of the Virgin Islands. It will also result in a substantial saving in personnel and appropriations over the program originally submitted.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Following are letters from the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, recommending enactment of this legislation. The letter from the

Department of the Interior is directed to the identical bill (H. R. 8357) which was considered but not reported in the Eighty-first Congress. The letter from the Department of Agriculture is directed to the bill herewith reported (H. R. 4027) and embodies the revised program recommendations of that department.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, May 9, 1950.

Hon. HAROLD D. COOLEY,
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR MR. COOLEY: This is in reply to your informal request for the views of this Department on H. R. 8357, a bill to provide for an agricultural program in the Virgin Islands.

I recommend that H. R. 8357 be enacted.

This bill would authorize the transfer of jurisdiction over the agricultural experiment stations in the Virgin Islands from the Secretary of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture, and would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to establish and maintain an agricultural research and extension service program in the Virgin Islands.

At the request of this Department, the Secretary of Agriculture recently appointed a special committee to study the agricultural resources, needs, and possibilities of the Virgin Islands. In its comprehensive report, a copy of which I understand has already been made available to your committee, the special committee concluded that the Virgin Islands needed a coordinated agricultural program, under the primary administrative responsibility of a single Federal agency with sufficient functional elasticity to cope with the problems and conditions peculiar to the Virgin Islands. The report also indicated clearly the existence of a high potential for an expansion and diversification of agriculture in the Virgin Islands, and further that a program with such an objective can be conducted successfully in the islands.

The Department of the Interior, which exercises administrative supervision over the Virgin Islands, has as one of its fundamental objectives the economic, political, and social development of the Virgin Islands. This over-all objective can be advanced by a well-planned and well-coordinated research and extension service program, which the enactment of H. R. 8357 would make possible in the Virgin Islands. Such a program can perform a vital function and make a valuable contribution to the standard of living of Virgin Islanders and to the development of a more wholesome and integrated economy in the islands. The transfer of jurisdiction over the agricultural experiment stations in the Virgin Islands from the Secretary of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture should be effected in order to enable the Department of Agriculture to coordinate most effectively the work of the agricultural stations with the proposed research and extension programs to be conducted in the islands.

I therefore wholeheartedly support H. R. 8357 and urge its enactment at the earliest possible date.

The Bureau of the Budget advises that enactment of H. R. 8357 would be in accord with the program of the President.

Sincerely yours,

WILLIAM E. WARNE,
Acting Secretary of the Interior.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, June 6, 1951.

Hon. HAROLD D. COOLEY,
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture,
House of Representatives.

DEAR MR. COOLEY: This is in response to your request of May 14, 1951, for a report on H. R. 4027, a bill to provide for an agricultural program in the Virgin Islands.

On October 27, 1949, we transmitted to you a legislative proposal for extending departmental programs in the fields of agricultural research and extension to the Virgin Islands. Our plans for conducting these programs, if authorized, together with an estimate of administrative cost, were set forth in an accompany-

ing report of a committee of this Department on the agricultural resources, needs, and possibilities of the Virgin Islands. A bill to implement this proposal, H. R. 8357, was introduced in the Eighty-first Congress, second session. A hearing on this bill was held by the House Committee on Agriculture on June 15, 1950.

As a result of questions brought out in this hearing we have reconsidered our original proposal and are now offering for your consideration some additional suggestions. Our comments are directed to H. R. 4027, Eighty-second Congress, first session, which would authorize the program originally recommended now under consideration by the Committee on Agriculture.

Research and extension program activities in the Virgin Islands, if authorized, could be conducted under the local leadership of a director. Under such an arrangement, the local leader would have a joint assignment for the local administration of both research and extension activities and would be considered as the administrative representative of the Department of Agriculture in matters involving those activities in the Virgin Islands. This proposed organization anticipates that technical advice and assistance would be provided to the program from technical specialists of the appropriate agencies of the Department. In the initial phases the work will involve the adaptation of existing extension procedures and known research facts to the problems of the Virgin Islands. Because of this it will be necessary to have well-trained and experienced workers.

Major research efforts in the beginning will be directed to problems associated with water conservation and use, for future agricultural development depends upon available water. In crop production attention will be directed toward determining the value of superior varieties and management practices under the conditions of the Virgin Islands.

Enclosed is an estimate of the administrative cost for the anticipated program for the first year. This is a conservative estimate for exploratory research studies and essential education programs and may need to be changed after further exploration of the problems.

It should be pointed out that in the Virgin Islands it will be necessary for the Department of Agriculture to bear full responsibility for extension education and the development and carrying out of the research program because of the absence of any local institution similar to the land-grant college organization in the States with which cooperative relations could be established. This situation constitutes of course, a departure from the normal pattern of cooperative Federal-State extension work which prevails on the mainland. In assuming this kind of responsibility in the Virgin Islands, which H. R. 4027 would provide, it therefore seems sensible to consider a local consolidation of administrative authority for research and extension according to the pattern which has been used successfully in many of the State colleges and universities. In order to have an effective research program cooperative working relations would have to be effected with the Virgin Islands Company and this Department as indicated in the recommendations of the committee report on agricultural resources, needs and possibilities of the Virgin Islands.

It is recognized that, if the program is authorized, subsequent experience may lead to the advisability of using other administrative arrangements and this would be possible under the provisions of H. R. 4027.

Section 2, H. R. 4027, wisely provides that only that part of the functions, property, and personnel of the existing agricultural stations in the Virgin Islands be transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture that may be agreed upon by the two Secretaries. From the recommendations of the Department of Agriculture committee, referred to above, the following statement is highly significant:

"The agricultural problems of St. Thomas do not justify the continuance of the present field station on that island or the carrying out of any extensive research program. It is recommended that the station be abolished, and that its agricultural services and facilities be transferred to the Virgin Islands Company.

"It has been proposed by the Department of the Interior that the present station facilities on St. Croix be transferred to the Department of Agriculture. This station is rather poorly located from the standpoint of carrying out the proposed research program. Likewise, the station facilities are in poor condition, being old frame buildings. The purpose which these facilities now serve, namely, providing general agricultural services such as sire service, sale of seed, insecticides, and fertilizers for the locality, should undoubtedly be continued, and it is recommended that these services and facilities be transferred to the Virgin Islands Company.

"It is therefore proposed that the Department of Agriculture request the Virgin Islands Company to provide land and new physical facilities that are needed

for the contemplated new research program. The capital improvements could be made under the Virgin Islands Company program and leased to the Department on a long-term basis. It is contemplated that such facilities would include office and laboratories, storage space, water catchments, garage space, and housing for the technical research staff recruited on the continent, as well as facilities for such phases of the work as pilot-plant sugarcane operations. This proposal has been discussed informally with the representatives of the Department of the Interior and they indicated they would consider such a proposal."

The Department of Agriculture would undoubtedly have use for certain of the existing facilities and it would be our desire, of course, to make use of them to the fullest extent possible. But the transfer of the entire physical plant on both islands would constitute a distinct liability for this Department in carrying out the program contemplated in H. R. 4027.

The Department of Agriculture recommends the enactment of H. R. 4027.

The Bureau of the Budget advises that there is no objection to the submission of this report and that enactment of the proposed legislation would be in accord with the program of the President.

Sincerely,

CHARLES F. BRANNAN, *Secretary.*

Agricultural research and extension activities in the Virgin Islands

Grade	Number	Position	Salary
Personal services:			
Professional services:			
GS-13	1	Agriculturist, director	$7,600
GS-12	1	Extension agent at large	6,400
GS-11	1	Soil and water conservationist (research).	5,400
GS-11	1	Forester (research)	5,400
GS-9	1	Home demonstration agent	4,600
GS-9	1	Assistant agricultural agent	4,600
Subprofessional services:			
GS-4	4	Research	11,500
Clerical, administrative, fiscal:			
GS-5	1		3,100
GS-4	1		2,875
			51,475
Additional pay for service abroad			12,869
			64,344
Unclassified labor			10,000
Temporary			12,000
Total personal services			86,344
Other obligations		Travel	8,000
		Transportation	1,000
		Communications	1,000
		Rent and utility services	500
		Printing and binding	1,500
		Supplies and materials	5,000
		Equipment	6,000
Total other obligations			23,000
Total			109,344

O